

Editorial recommendation for Internet links

Empowering the rural disabled in Asia and the Pacific*

Editors's note

The role and value of a person with a disability is not parallel across cultures, particularly in rural communities and non-Anglican and European countries. In the United States, our culture has only recently begun to value the worthiness of each person as a individual. As each person is valued independently, counselors may meet one-on-one, develop individualized rehabilitation plans, and assemble customer-specific assistive technology. While the Anglican and European cultures accept and applaud individual attention and assessment, other cultures bear malice towards singular focus. Rather, the society and family remain the focus point. All must be mindful of these cultural variations, and not be ethnocentric in assuming all rehabilitation processes are global.

In 1997, the United Nations took a broad step in analyzing the role of the person with a disability living in rural communities. The role was analyzed and defined statistically, socially, culturally, agriculturally, educationally, and economically among countries in South-east Asia. The results? A thorough and heuristic analysis was completed to develop education and training and social programs for persons with disabilities residing in rural communities of Asia and the Pacific. The following represents a summary of the papers. While the summaries raise awareness, the information also raises questions. The reader may refer to the URL (fao.org/waicent/faoinfo/sustdev/PPdirect/PPre0035.htm) for complete text. It is the intent of the Editor to provide the readers with an international glimpse of rural rehabilitation culture so the reader may not only observe various viewpoints, but also learn about cultural diversity as related to rural rehabilitation practice. This information is not presented as "peer reviewed" material, but rather reference material for educational and research purposes. The reader may refer to Table 1 for a summary review of disability statistics for Asia and the Pacific. The respective author is noted be-

fore brief narratives. It is important to note the Editor chose to keep wording of the narratives as indicated, and changes have not been made to ensure all terms are "politically correct." Rather, the narratives are in format presented by the individual scholars.

The Guest Editor wishes to thank Mr. Lawrence Jacobson for his support and consent to use this material. He may be reached at lawrence.jacobson@fao.org.

Introduction by Soetatwo Hadiwigeno

Among the marginalized and vulnerable populations in the Asia and Pacific Region, the condition of disabled rural people is probably the most difficult. As many as 70–80% of disabled people are farmers and rural workers, or disabled soldiers who have returned to the land. In order to alleviate the poverty they face, these people need to capitalize on any special capacity, skills or knowledge they have in order to start a new livelihood. These include, wheel-chair farming, small implement-making, repair shop management, blacksmithing, hydroponic and aeroponic greenhouse horticulture, apiculture or bee-keeping, sericulture or silk making, vermiculture or worm production, small scale food preparation and processing. These individuals constitute FAO's primary target as we focus on this challenging field. FAO's mandate provides an overarching commitment to include rural disabled people in farm and non-farm employment opportunities and in programmes for:

1. prevention of disability through safe use of agrochemicals
2. reduction of accidents through the safe use of agricultural tools and implements
3. nutritional adequacy through improved dietary practices and food security
4. disease reduction through provision of safe agricultural water supplies

Table 1
Review of disability statistics within Asia and the South Pacific

Country	Year	Number/percentage of disabled population
Bangladesh	1985	10% of the population
India	1981	12 million
Indonesia	1990	(est.) 300,000 handicapped children
China	1985	50 million are disabled. Among them, 8.7 million are children between 0–14 years, i.e., 41.3 million are disabled adults
Republic of Korea	1985	2.5% of the population or 915,000
Nepal	????	3% of the population
Pakistan	????	10 million handicapped (4.6 million adults)
The Philippines	????	3.4 million disabled children
Sri Lanka	1987	12% of all primary school going children suffer from visual, speech, hearing and motor problems
Vietnam	1989	There are 1.5 million handicapped children and youth

Source: Report on the Tenth APEID Regional Seminar on Special Education, Japanese National

5. accident prevention in agro- and forestry industry operations

In May 1997, FAO sponsored a Round Table Meeting on the “Integration of Disabled People in Agricultural and Agro-industry Systems”, held in Bangkok. During this Round Table Meeting, substantial issues were considered, including the status of rural disabled women, disabled persons in agricultural systems, sensorially disabled persons in rural areas, motor, visually and mentally disabled persons in agriculture, and accident prevention in rural areas. FAO has now started on the path of developing articulated policies and strategies for improving the poverty alleviation and income generating capacities of the rural disabled, an important sector of the rural poor.

The meeting demonstrated FAO’s concern and commitment to support the objectives of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993–2002 in a more concrete and visible way. The result of the deliberations and the guidelines developed for the Integration of the Disabled in Agriculture and Agro Industries will break new ground in improving rural development and combating rural poverty.

Disabled women in rural areas of the region, by Fameedah Wahab

This paper has been well-researched given the limited information available. An evaluation of the situation of disabled women in eleven countries of the region is made with more emphasis given to the author’s own country (Bangladesh), India, Pakistan and Thailand where information on socio-cultural and educational situations is more available. The author describes some of the inadequacies of the existing systems for

servicing disabled women in the region and reminds us of the large gaps in the public education/information that still remain to be filled before prejudices and ignorance can disappear. She explains that improving the communication capacities of the non-disabled to communicate with the disabled is one important factor in the integration of the disabled in society. She concludes by saying that disabled people have immense potentials which remain untapped. These can be put to productive and profitable use to benefit the family, the society and the country and that a nation’s development progress can be measured by the ease with which it integrates the disabled into the mainstream of society.

The status of motor disabled people within the agricultural and rural in Cambodia, by Marc Bonnet

Cambodia’s recent history of war, the presence of millions of landmines, continued armed conflict in certain areas, the lack of basic health care and the absolute poverty of the majority of its citizens all contribute to the fact that Cambodia is a country with a high number of disabled people, many of them in what would be their productive years. There are no national statistics available in Cambodia; however, it is thought that 2–3% of the population of Cambodia is disabled, making the per capita rate of disability one of the highest in the world. Due to the seasonal nature of agriculture, off-farm activities are crucial for farmers to earn supplementary income; thus there is also a need to train farmers in such activities. There are vocational training schools and centres but many of these are located in or near Phnom Penh. The majority of these vocational schools teach skills that are not useful for the rural areas and are often not driven by demand or by the local

market. In addition, there is insufficient post-training follow-up and assistance with finding employment. Often disabled people cannot attend these centers because they are not mobile or because they cannot leave their families for an extended period of time; others cannot read and write. Few programs exist that provide mobile, short-term training, apprenticeship-style training or that reach the disabled in their own home. Most disabled do not have the funds to start up their own business; thus there is also a need for programs to facilitate their access to credit schemes.

Motor and upper limb disabled people in the agricultural industry in Sri Lanka, by C. Siriwardene

Of the 900,000 disabled people living in Sri Lanka, about 45,000 have motor or upper limb disabilities. The ratio is estimated to be 75% men and 25% women. Approximately 90% of persons with disabilities live in rural areas. The author stresses the importance of education particularly for disabled children since facilities for them in rural areas are generally lacking. Various types of income earning jobs in which the rural disabled in Sri Lanka are engaged are described. The state of existing health and social services, most of which are located in urban areas, is also explained. The author points out that although traditionally it is considered a family responsibility to look after any member who has a disability, these traditions are eroding. The state has only partly filled this gap due to financial constraints. One important demand that has to be met is the need for any types of aids or equipment for disabled people.

Blind disabled people and the Thai rural economy, by Prayat Punong-ong

This very informative paper provides a lot of details on existing NGOs in the country that are helping the disabled to survive. It also provides basic data on the composition and structure of the disabled population in Thailand. Although critical of the government's low level of financial assistance to the disabled, the author is positive when he refers to government efforts to bring new technology to meet local needs and teach them how to use it. The author suggests that there are many things that can be done to improve the living situations of the rural disabled, such as treating the disabled like others in all aspects of life, giving them

names at birth and registering them with their family, providing them with ID cards which recognize them as members of society and teaching general society to recognize the economic capabilities of the disabled so that private businesses can effect changes in their hiring methods. His comments about equal opportunity are well-illustrated when he says; "True democracy, like a limousine and a three-wheeled rickshaw caught in the same traffic jam, comes when the disabled have equal opportunity with the non-disabled population".

Motor disabled people in rural areas of Vietnam, by Dr. Ho Nhu Hai

This paper has been prepared by Dr. Ho Nhu Hai, Vice Director, Department of Social Protection, Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs, Vietnam. It provides outside readers with the first complete picture of the current situation of the rural motor disabled in this war-devastated country. As the author emphasizes, a country like his own, now in the process of recovering from a long drawn out war has a lot of renovation to do. This includes the rehabilitation of their motor disabled, of which there are more than 450,000. Vietnamese Government policies, which encourage the provision of preferential credits, free primary education, community health and free medical treatment and examination for the disabled and the poor, have helped, but more is needed; however, the author notes that additional coordinated support from donor, specialized UN agencies like FAO and NGOs will be necessary to adequately address and cope with this immense problem.

The "Midas Touch" of food and agro-industries for income generation by disabled people, by Alastair Hicks

Increased agricultural production is prerequisite to alleviation of rural poverty. But of itself, agricultural growth is not sufficient to eradicate poverty. Nor can it create adequate opportunities for enhanced rural employment, income generation and economic access to food. Two basic issues emerge when looking at the rural sector of the Asia and the Pacific Region. Prospects are bleak for countries depending mainly upon agricultural production, to absorb an increasing labour force. On-farm employment potential is diminishing. Relative purchasing power of rural populations is declining, cutting into their capacity to ensure adequate nutrition.

Exports of primary products have shrunk or suffered in terms of monetary return due to inequitable trade regimes, inflation and other reasons. Employment objectives must be explicitly integrated into rural industrialization strategy. This calls for appropriate policies, technologies and supporting institutions capable of reaching the village and household levels, providing rural disabled entrepreneurs with necessary incentives. These can unleash dormant creativity without alienating producers from their setting.

Adaptive techniques for horticultural crops production by disabled people, by Narong Chomchalow

Adaptive to urban/sub-urban areas of production: Production of horticultural crops which requires less area but intensive cultivation practices are adaptive to be produced in urban/sub-urban areas even though the cost of land is much higher than in the rural areas, but these areas have the advantages of being close to the markets and other facilities required for a better quality

of life of the residents. Esther Dean's concept of a "No Dig Garden" is tailor-made for disabled people, and has wide appeal because it saves time and effort, and is friendly to the environment since it keeps the soil in good repair. She provides a variety of ideas, such as making gardens in pots, placing pots on casters and creating raised garden beds for people with mobility problems. Various horticultural crops can be produced commercially by disabled people with minor modifications in the techniques. These include vegetables, flowers, ornamental plants, fruits, mushrooms, herbs and spices. However, to earn more and having less risk, the producers should produce crops which are on demand in time and place and choose the right kinds of crops. Gardening, whether performed by normal or disabled people, whether for hobby or for career, certainly helps the gardeners both physically and mentally. With numerous reported cases of the therapeutic value of gardening, it is logical to take the concept a step further by stressing the healing qualities of gardening, particularly for those who are being disturbed by disability, chronic illness, or other mental disturbances.